

Zsombor TÓTH

**AD MARTYRAS...
PERSECUTION, EXILE AND
MARTYRDOM:
EARLY MODERN
MARTYROLOGICAL
DISCOURSES AS INVENTED
TRADITIONS¹**



I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most highly esteemed traditions of European culture is the one promoting the discourse on martyrs and martyrdom. The question of martyrdom as an act of witnessing or demonstrating loyalty has been subject of almost all kind of sacred or worldly orders, institutions and enterprises. This article is locating its focus of interest on the early modern period, and will investigate the development and functions of martyrological discourses. The aim of this examination is to decipher the historical anthropological features of a theological tradition promoting, using and inventing the tradition of martyrdom. In doing so, I shall rely on Hobsbawm's concept of invented tradition. For Hobsbawm argues that the main function of invented traditions is to build an ideologically and politically functioning link with the past, in order to validate certain values and norms of behaviour for the sake of *continuity*. Moreover, he argues that the peculiarity of invented traditions consists in the fact that this continuity proves to be largely fictitious (Hobsbawm 1994: 1–2).

Consequently, I propose a case study meant to explore the intricate relation between persecution and the theological tradition of martyrdom. My endeavour seeks to exhibit how the theological concept of martyrdom, as act of witnessing employed in the narratives of ecclesiastical history, functions as an invented tradition. I will claim that traditional Protestant and Calvinist martyrological narratives, due to the repeated acts of invention, could be the objects of a cultural transfer attributing new applications besides the theological ones. I will conclude my argumentation by claiming that the loyalty of the martyr towards the True Church (*Vera Ecclesia*) through the act of invention becomes the prototype of the patriot loyal to his fatherland (*Patria*).

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II. ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY: COMPETING NARRATIVES AND TRADITIONS

Irena Backus has poignantly marked off the role of history in the Reformation when examining the intricate relation between historical writings/practice of historical writing of the age and confessional identity. Accordingly, historical writing and history became the primary means for the competing churches to forge a confessional identity, which, displaying orthodoxy and authenticity as its determining features, would supposedly project the concept of True Church (*Vera Ecclesia*) upon the select community of its originators (Backus 2003: 3-4). After the schism within the Catholic Church has been consumed, the opposing, first parties, later confessional communities, started a ruthless mediatic war to assume the denomination of the *True Church*. It was clear that he who prevails will control the disparate and confused communities and will articulate them into a confessional structure, a new church.

The strategy of the Reformation designed by its most brilliant and devoted minds was to develop a new master narrative, as an account of ecclesiastical history, validating the emergence of the Reformed Church in all possible perspectives. In addition, they opted for a new narrative strategy, claiming an unbroken lineage stemming from the primitive church and its fathers, but intentionally omitting the corrupt and deplorable timespan identified as the period of the medieval Catholic Church. The pattern for this narrative account was borrowed from Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which would become a most influential text; it was very soon translated into both English and French (Grapin 1544; Hanmer 1577). Consequently, Eusebius's claim that the ecclesiastical history depicts the confrontation between the True Church (*Vera Ecclesia*) and False Church (*Falsa Ecclesia*) was enthusiastically embraced and advanced as the major interpretive trope to explain the persecution and narrate the history of the Reformed Church. While Eusebius was preoccupied with assuring the credibility of the apostolic succession, for he wanted to prove that Catholic orthodoxy was the true 'heir' of the apostolic church (Minton 2002: 719), early modern Reformers needed Eusebius's concept and narrative to link the Reformed Church to the Primitive Church, without losing the attribute of orthodoxy in terms of doctrine and theological teaching.

The Catholic propaganda set forth a different approach. Since their main concern was to stigmatize the Reformed initiations as dangerous heretical innovations, they hurried to identify them as heretics, too. Luc Racaut provides a telling example from the 1560s, when the French Huguenots were declared to be the descendants of a thirteenth-century heretic group, the Albigens (Racaut 2002: 36). However, this is not an isolated case, for Catholic propaganda tried to discredit the Reformers by associating their leaders, texts and actions with the heretic movements. Yet, this plan of action did not pay off, for the expected result turned out to be quite the opposite. Their intention to equate the image of the heretic with the Reformer proved to be a failure since the reformed elite counteracted? with a brilliant move. They did not refute the charge, but assumed it in order to demonstrate that the representatives of the True Church, those heroes who dared to confront the papacy, had always been persecuted from the very beginning of Christianity. The Catholic ideological attack associating the heretic tradition to the Reformation provided an excellent narrative as it contributed to the invention of a tradition hallmarked by Eusebius's theory. The medieval episodes of the heretic movement were transformed into a precious historical precedent sustaining the, otherwise fictitious, continuity with the Primitive Church (Brad 2001: 121-

123). Moreover, as a consequence, the heretical movements, which did not share anything in common with the Reformation in terms of doctrine, endorsed a master narrative about persecution, envisaging the martyrs of the True Church as often undertaking the major sacrifice. This is, undisputedly, a classic case of invented tradition.

II. 1. The Early Modern Corpus of Martyrological Literature

The master narrative which brought about the success of the Reformation and the redefinition of the Reformed Church functioned as an invented tradition, and fulfilled two major tasks. First of all, it endorsed the reformed vision upon the Church, its past and its history. Secondly, in a similar way, provided the Reformation with the so-called *récit martyrologique* (. El Kenz 1997: 11) a special genre promoting, narrating and advertising the early modern reformed concept of martyrdom. Sometimes it coincided with the narratives of ecclesiastical history, sometimes it just conveyed experiences of martyrs, or recorded acts of fulfilled martyrdom. All in all, it represented a major component of that particular early modern medial, spiritual and cultural construction, which was defined as the protestant culture of martyrdom (*la culture protestant de martyrs*, El Kenz 1997: 11).

Martyrs and martyrdom, due to the mediatic revolution won by the Reformation, were of utmost importance. From the very early stages of the Reformation it was clear for its leaders that the persecution of individuals or communities, after having been incorporated into narratives, the so-called *récit martyrologique*, must be spread and promoted relying on the latest technology, that is, printed texts. Luther himself, not only advised his supporters to bear witness to evangelical truth, but also acted like a martyrologist and wrote the story of a martyr, the sad case of Hendrik van Zutphen (Luther 1525). The Huguenots communities were subject of harsh and permanent persecution in France. The situation worsened after Calvin's expatriation in 1535, thus the persecution persisted in the decades to come, culminating in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. Outside the continent a more or less similar situation was prevailing in England, for under the rule of the Tudors the Reformation, after a spectacular start, remained stuck and subdued to royal eccentricity. Moreover, under the reign of the Catholic Mary, persecution was unleashed, hence the number and cases of martyrdom abruptly increased.

As a general response of the Reformers to this overwhelming wave of persecution and violence was the promotion of an impressive corpus of texts, influential narratives about cases of martyrdom conceived and tailored to the special features of early modern martyrological discourse as invented tradition. These texts and their authors, often subjects of persecution and exile, were eager to immortalize and fictionalize the clash between the True Church and False Church serving the immediate interests of the Reformation. The German Ludwig Rabus was among the first to provide such a narrative profiting immensely of the printed media's advantages. His ecclesiastical history, first published in 1552, had several further editions (. Rabus 1552).

Another spectacular case is represented by John Foxe, living and writing in exile. His work, which was to become one of the most popular English early modern prints, had not less than 9 editions between 1563 and 1684 (King 2006: 23). In addition, it is worth mentioning that its Latin version preceded the first English edition. Foxe's text (Foxe 1563), known as *The Book of Martyrs*, was an impressive compilation resulting from the determined work of several 'authors.' However, it is also impressive its reception, for apart from the 9 consecutive editions, it was also used, in fact rewritten and comprised into, the work

of another martyrologist, Henricus Pantaleonus (Pantaleonus 1563). This martyrologist took Foxe's Latin work published in 1559, and simply added to it a second volume, also in Latin, narrating cases of martyrdom in France, Italy and Spain. The rationale behind this procedure was that Foxe restricted his view only upon the martyrs of Scotland and England, thus Pantaleonus, to offer an extensive view of persecution in Europe, felt the need of completing it. This case reveals an important feature of martyrological literature as a genre. The martyrologists, as writers but very often as reporters, historians and even anthropologist-like investigators, incorporated every possible written and oral source into their texts to develop and increase this literature. It became a dangerously proliferating body of texts, conceived and written up in accordance with a deliberate intertextuality professed by every martyrologist.

The French Calvinist writers and printers, Jean Crespin and Simon Goulart, were two further authors of martyrologies conceived and published in a similar way. Crespin's first work in French (Crespin 1554) was followed by a Latin edition bearing the suggestive title *Acta Martyrum* (Crespin 1556). Further proof of the popularity of Crespin's work are the several German translations and editions published well into the beginnings of the 17th century. After his death, Simon Goulart carried on this writing, editing and printing activity considerably developing the martyrological literature of the age (Goulart 1582).

III. THE HUNGARIAN RECEPTION AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

After the peace treaty of Vasvár (1664) had been signed, loyalty to the Habsburgs, even within the territory of Upper Hungary, was in continuous decline. The Hungarians' hostile attitude was fuelled by the Habsburg administration's unpopular activities which patently promoted the imperial interests, quite often against the expectations and immediate interests of the Hungarian estates. Thus conflict, indeed rebellion, was unavoidable. Although the Habsburgs had managed to uncover the initial conspiracy (1671) and execute its protagonists, the supporters of the opposition were still far too numerous and a military conflict was unleashed. The rebellion led first by Mihály Teleki (1672) and then by Imre Thököly (1680), was sustained by the Ottoman Porte and assisted by the principality of Transylvania (Kontler 1999: 179–182).

Amidst the sometimes entangled and multiple political interests Thököly at first seemed to be more successful than his predecessor, Teleki. After having consolidated his position as supreme commander of the rebels – the so-called „Bújdósók” (*the Refugees*) – in 1682, he concentrated on his own political ambitions. With Ottoman support he occupied the strategically important cities of Upper Hungary, married Ilona Zrínyi, the widow of Ferenc Rákóczi (and daughter of Péter Zrínyi, one of the leaders executed in 1671), then launched his claim for the title of King of Hungary. The lack of reaction from the Habsburgs' side, due in part to Vienna's preoccupation with the war against France, and the continuous political and military support provided by the Ottomans, facilitated his political success markedly. Thus in 1682, as an athname sent by the Porte attests, Thököly had become the King of Upper Hungary.

Yet his rule proved to be fugitive. The frustrations caused by the demoralizing series of military defeats made the Ottomans reconsider their political and military strategies. Disgraced, Thököly ended up in an Ottoman prison (1685). Still, in the precipitating events of the years to come, he was given a new chance and he was resolved to exploit the newly

emerging conjuncture. Even though the Ottomans lost Buda (1686) and Transylvania was occupied by the Habsburgs (1687), the year 1690 revived their hopes. Thököly's unexpected victory at Zernyest (*rom.* Zernești) over the joint Transylvanian and Habsburg forces created the impression, in the context of the contemporary events, that the Christians might still lose the great war against the Ottomans. Thököly's attempt to push the advantage of his position was, however, only partially successful. He became prince of Transylvania, but was subsequently forced to leave the principality together with his „kuruc” army. Then the lost battle of Zenta (1697) and the peace treaty of Karlowicz (1699) nullified all his political ambitions (Kontler 1999: 181–183).

However, these various military conflicts were not isolated from other major events taking place in the confessionally demarcated region of East Central Europe in the second part of the 17th century. Tripartite Hungary, situated between the Christian and Muslim worlds, was itself confessionally divided. The principality of Transylvania, as the last bastion of Western civilization, was a Calvinist state, while the Hungarian Kingdom, although inhabited by Lutherans as well, was transforming escalating Jesuit and Habsburg pressure into a predominantly Catholic region. The confessional differences, and especially the ebullient fanaticism of the religious debates, were intertwined with political intentions, interests and motivations. The problematic church-state antagonism, as an expression of apparent balance, was often the result of political challenges and responses conceived in regional and confessional contexts.

It seems plausible that the unfortunate military expedition against Poland (1657–1658) undertaken by Transylvania undermined its power and authority as the regional protector of Protestantism. Thereupon the Habsburgs, under the plausible pretext of conspiracy, organized a merciless campaign against the intellectual elite, mostly Protestant priests and teachers (both Calvinists and Lutherans), accusing them of ideological agitation and of inciting the population against their ruler, the Emperor. Thus, even as the *Judicium Delegatum* ordered the execution of the Hungarian aristocrats accused of involvement in the conspiracy, the second step had already been prepared. The elimination of the leaders who might have mobilized military units or gained foreign political support was followed by a second wave of retribution, the elimination of the ideologically and politically influential strata of intellectuals, the representatives of the Reformed Churches. In April 1674, three hundred Calvinist and Lutheran priests and teachers were sentenced to death on the charge of treason against the Emperor and the Kingdom (Péter 1983: 31–39). The Habsburg administration was seriously preoccupied with the threat posed by the ideological and political importance of the Protestant intelligentsia. The highly influential role displayed by the Protestant clergy constituted a difficult impediment for the military, political and confessional expansion of the empire.

Most notably, those Calvinist and Lutheran priests who had refused to recant, were sentenced to the galleys in 1675 (Makkai 1976: 5). Those who survived were released only after the political intervention of the Netherlands, when the Habsburgs, probably under the international political pressure and burdened by multiple wars, decided to withdraw the initial sentence (1676). In the meantime, a number of parishes were violently occupied and Calvinist or Lutheran communities and their priests regularly persecuted. It is notable that the seemingly separate chain of events – the military actions undertaken by the refugees under the command of Wesselényi, Teleki and Thököly – and the persecution of the Protestant priests, converge in some relevant consequences. The Habsburgs' political, military

and confessional attitudes made them the common and paramount enemy of all Hungarians and confessions, except perhaps Catholics, living in the different regions of tripartite Hungary. Thus the sufferings of the priests and the heroic fight and death of the rebels must have been regarded as almost martyr-like undertakings by a small number of extraordinary men. Moreover, political freedom became identified with religious and confessional freedom.

Thus „national church” and the „homeland” were again brought closer to each other and integrated in the common desires, expectations and actions of both suffering priests and fighting rebels. Most importantly, due to their often similar end, their unavoidable death occurring in combat or during persecution, both priests and soldiers might have easily become martyrs, or they could represent the quintessence of the nation, which was to define itself in this extreme experience (Tóth 2010: 550).

III. 1. Theological and Political Literature of the „*Persecutio Decennalis*”

Having briefly surveyed both the military operation of Thököly's followers and the persecution of the Protestant priests, we can reasonably assume that an ideologically link was created between these two series of events. It is quite possible that the ideological sources animating the Hungarians' opposition were organically related to the theologically and homiletically formulated discourses of the Hungarian Calvinist Church. Indeed, the Catholic expansion launched against the Hungarian Calvinists and Lutherans was overtly sustained by Vienna. The Habsburg administration provided military troops or sent clear orders to the military forces garrisoned on the territory of Upper Hungary to contribute to the (re)occupation of churches and parishes. The military interventions often descended into extreme violence. In addition to this, the humiliating experiences endured by the priests on the galleys directly contributed to the emergence of the concept and collective memory of „*persecutio decennalis*,”² the decade of persecution, referring to the period between 1671 and 1681.

The political impact caused by the impressive corpus of Hungarian,³ Latin,⁴ English⁵ and German writings performed a double function. Firstly, by promoting anti-Habsburg political feelings to converge with the traditional confessional dichotomy (Protestantism vs. Catholicism), they cemented the ideological grounds for both confessional and political counter-attacks. Secondly, by invoking Protestant solidarity, they successfully transformed this internal affair into an international scandal. Due to its vivid and multilingual European

2 Pál Okolicsányi used this term for the first time in his book dealing with the history of the Evangelical estates: „...eruperit dira illa *persecutio decennalis* ab Anno 1671 usque ad Annum 1681 (Okolicsányi 1710: 51).”

3 The sermon literature of the period was intensely preoccupied with these events and their sombre consequences; see Técsi 1675; Szöllősi 1676; Tholnai 1673.

4 Bálint Csergő Kocsi (1647–1700) was one of those priests who survived this harsh experience and wrote a Latin memoir entitled *Narratio brevis*. Péter Bod (1712–1769), a Protestant priest and historian was strongly interested in the history of Hungarian martyrs and translated this text into Hungarian (Bod 1866).

5 In 1675 an anonymous book was published in London, providing an account about the Protestants in France and also containing a shorter text referring to the Hungarian Protestants (Gabrielsson 1675).

reception, the sufferings and persecution of the Hungarian Calvinists and Lutherans received an enormous amount of sympathy and political support. In addition, the political and military rivals of the Habsburg, such as the French, eagerly exploited the political benefits of the discontents (Tóth 2010: 550–551).

III. 2. The First Hungarian Martyrology: the Beginning of a Tradition

István Nagy Szőnyi (1633–1709) promoted a powerful pattern of martyrology which seems to have had a remarkable reception during the decade of persecution. Szőnyi studied first in Debrecen, then in Utrecht and Groningen. After his return to Hungary he became the minister of Torna, but was unable to remain since he was banished by the Jesuits with the military support provided by the Habsburgs (1671). This humiliating event deeply influenced his life. Forced to leave, he went to Debrecen, then to Zilah (*Rom. Zalău*) in Transylvania. In 1675 he joined the army of the refugees and was active as a preacher. His deep commitment to the cause is illustrated by his literary activity as well.

His first work, signed with the telling *nom-de-plume*, Philopatrus, was entitled „The Pious Champion” and ostensibly dedicated to the memory of Gustavus Adolphus, the great protector of European Protestantism. In fact, Szőnyi’s intention was to adopt the motif of the *miles Christi* or *athleta Christi* modelled on Gustavus’s example, in order to explore the implications of the struggle for religious and political freedom. The subtitle of the work, „The Short History of the Pious Champion or the Late Sovereign Gustavus Adolphus King of Sweden and his most praiseworthy fight for bodily and spiritual freedom,” clearly reveals his preoccupation to create multiple parallels between the deeds of the late king, the spiritual fight of the protestant priests and the military combat undertaken by the refugees (Szőnyi 1675a: A1r).

The construction of „bodily and spiritual freedom” as a perspective or motive for military resistance, refers to the core of the ideology formulated by Szőnyi. The religious discourse in fact displayed an impressive repertoire of homiletic devices designed to persuade the readership of the organic link between the urgent need to liberate both the Church and the fatherland from their common enemy. Cast in the form of a long sermon upon the example of the pious Swedish king, Szőnyi’s work sets forth the ideal behaviour pattern of all true Christians, that is, to undertake the moral, spiritual and, if needed, the physical fight against the enemy threatening the Church, the fatherland and their freedom. Thus he emphasized that the main purpose of his work is to exhibit „in a steel mirror ... the indissoluble unity between Bravery and Piety (Szőnyi 1675a: A1r).”

Szőnyi’s ideological argument introduced a new concept, the existence of a dichotomy between the private and common good (*privatum* vs. *publicum*). He claimed that most importantly, everybody should give up desperate selfishness or individual welfare for the sake of common values. Thus, his political argument set the need for individual survival against the undertaking of the common, even social burden for the sake of collective rights and freedom.

„Forget the continuous striving to attain your own personal comfort (*Privatum*) and try to obtain the common good (*Publicum*), the glory of God, the restoration of the bodily and spiritual freedom of your religion. If you gained this, you would possess in the Common good (*Publicum*) a plenty of private goods (*Privatum*) as well (Szőnyi 1675a: 6).”

Szőnyi's attempt to amalgamate piety with bravery, and the spiritual with the physical dimensions of the struggle, resulted, it seems, in a coherent propaganda focused upon *freedom* as an unalienable right in both a political and religious-confessional sense. Moreover, Szőnyi sought to equate military combat with religious and confessional resistance by attributing common motivation, aims and ideology to their supporters, namely soldiers and priests. Thus a common propagandistic background had been devised to validate the resistance as ideological war and military combat as well. However, Szőnyi's greatest merit was the formulation of individual and collective behaviour and identity patterns complemented by his preoccupation to interpret this in the context of the *privatum* vs. *publicum* relation. His vision, beyond the immediate historical context of the 1670s, was also remarkable as a theological and political effort to project a political order inhabited by (imagined) political communities, in which individual interests, at least theoretically, would be subordinated to the common good.

Szőnyi's second book, also published in 1675, crowned his previous efforts to design a Protestant martyrology following the example of Foxe. This time he presented the archetype of the martyr equally committed to the True Church as *Ecclesia* and the homeland as *Patria*. Like Foxe, his main concern was to impregnate the notion of martyr with a certain everyday rationality so as to persuade his readers that every Christian could potentially become a martyr. In this way, the saint of the Catholic hagiographic tradition, whose superhuman character was illustrated by the miracles he so easily performed, was replaced with the much different character of the *elect*, the godly but average man, willing to undertake the renewed task of the martyr which involved not necessary death, but the act of witnessing:

„He who bears witnesses to the Justice of Christ and undertakes in any possible manner suffering for the Gospel's truth is declared to be a martyr. In this broad sense, therefore, all those persons who serve the Lord honestly with their minds and souls every day, are considered to be martyrs, for they bear witness to the Truth (Szőnyi 1675b: 5).”

At the same time, Szőnyi incorporated in this secularized concept of martyrdom the traditional attributes of true Christians, such as patience, constancy and unconditional obedience to God. The common spiritual heritage of Protestantism and Neo-Stoicism must have certainly been determining factors, for John Foxe and Justus Lipsius were highly influential exponents of these ideas. According to Szőnyi: „...all those who patiently suffer their afflictions are martyrs” (Szőnyi 1675b: 5).

It is this recurrent concept of *patience* which became the main attribute of the Protestant martyrwho, in the context of double predestination, was willing to undertake everything that had been foreordained to him. This particular patience had the function of enabling the martyr to endure all extremities and afflictions during exile. Thus, all those who patiently suffer, even though their lives were spared, could become martyrs:

„Martyrs are those persons who bore witness to Justice, suffered prison or any kind of affliction, even though they did not meet their death.” (Szőnyi 1675b: 6)

While the early Christian martyrs or the saints of the Middle Ages were often declared martyrs because of a major sacrifice they had undertaken, the Protestant and especially Calvinist martyrology appreciated more the act of witnessing and patient suffering than deliberate death. Protestant martyrs seemed to be more preoccupied with earthly duties and values, which meant that the heroic but passive undertaking of death, did not have the same appeal. Although the supreme sacrifice was also appreciated, suffering and survival was more important than a passive death. According to Szőnyi:

„All those who were delivered into the hands of their persecutors are surely martyrs, for this is a sign that God sends them to martyrdom and glorifies Himself through the persons of these most dear Christians.” (Szőnyi 1675b: 6)

One can conclude that the shift from passive death toward patient suffering and survival added a new perspective to the Christian view of martyrdom. Indeed, one might argue that the very act of witnessing had thoroughly changed. While in the Catholic tradition the death of the martyr was the ultimate act of witnessing and commitment, early-modern Protestantism, and most importantly Calvinism, preferred the survival of the martyr and so refused to identify martyrdom with the obligatory suffering of death. The political and ideological functions attributed to Protestant martyrology might have been more easily performed by *living martyrs* than by dead persons, whose cult often proved to be problematic and controversial. Moreover, the escalating tendency to associate *Patria* with *Ecclesia* definitely favoured the extreme experience of exile or persecution over passive death. It was this extreme experience of exile, the necessity to leave one's homeland, church or religion, which underpinned Szőnyi's concept:

„Martyrs are those persons who are refugees, who fled from the bloody hands of the persecutors, for they witnessed the Truth. Therefore, they have lost all their fortune, houses and values and became servants among strangers and foreign peoples. They are in continuous necessity, and they are crying and sighing. Petrus Martyr writes about them: *Est enim ipsa fuga confessionis species. Quis enim non maluerit domi suae manere, bonis suis frui, suae gentis hominum familiaritate uti, quam pauper et ignotus in longinquam regionem peregre proficisci?* (Fleeing from persecutors is, so to say, a way to bear witness to the Truth. For, who would not rather stay at home at his own place and house, keep all his fortune and live amongst his own nation, than migrate in exile to distant places?” (Szőnyi 1675b: 5-6)

An illustration of these theoretical considerations was also provided by Szőnyi. The extreme experience of exile, during which, although not killed, one is forced to leave one's home and give up one's preoccupations and activities, was something directly experienced by him. I have already referred to the fact that Szőnyi himself was persecuted in 1671 and forced to leave the parish of Torna. The humiliating experience, the fact that he as a pastor had to leave his flock, surely became incorporated in his concept of martyrology. Furthermore, he clearly felt the need to make a direct association between the theory of martyrology and his own persecution. Consequently, he added a short narration to his book, enti-

tled: „*The Narrative about the Persecution and Exile of István Nagy Szőnyi from the Parish of Torna*” (Szőnyi 1675b: O5r-O8v). The story is a detailed account of how the Jesuit Pater Hirco, sustained by military forces, had occupied with violence the Calvinist Church of Torna and forced him to flee.

However, the significance of the story, as a form of memoir, is multiple. The strong link between the theory of martyrdom and his experiences of persecution are more than a late justification or a sort of Calvinist self-fashioning. It is the ultimate confirmation of all the claims made in the book about the nature, function and importance of martyrdom. By the integration of the story about his persecution, he was clearly offering an illustration, an example, confirming the assertions he had introduced in his book.

III. 3. The Invented Character of the Hungarian Tradition

The arguments displayed in the previous sections have already revealed a certain aspect of the ‘invented’ character of Szőnyi’s martyrology, by illustrating the fact that „The Crown of the Martyrs” belonged to the previously emerged and extant influential tradition of Reformed martyrology. Still, there is a further important context emphasizing the invented nature of early modern Hungarian martyrology as a tradition. For Szőnyi, imitating the practice of the most influential sixteenth-century martyrologists, sought to substantiate the *orthodoxy* and *antiquity* of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Thus, Szőnyi, for the sake of the cause, reached back to the oldest tradition, not only to some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antecedents, but to the martyrological tradition of the early church. His intention was to suggest an unbroken lineage of the martyrs and secure the claim about the continuity between the early church and the Reformed Church (Minton 2002: 720). This fictitious connection between the ecclesiastical history of the Early church and the Reformation, including the persecution in Royal Hungary during the 1670s, meant to sustain the claim about the orthodoxy of Reformed teaching, and confirming the status of *Vera Ecclesia*, through the historically proved and continuous persecution suffered by its martyrs.

Though Szőnyi refers to and quotes throughout his work several ancient authorities, such as Augustine, Cyprian, Origen and Gregory of Nazien, to name but a few, it is the case of Tertullian, which deserves a detailed examination. It seems to me, that besides those two explicit textual references to Tertullian’s *De Corona Millitum* and the *De Fuga in Persecutione* (Szőnyi 1675b: 8; 166), Szőnyi had much more intensely read and then applied Tertullian’s teachings to his own martyrology than the very few quotations might suggest. Nonetheless, there was something controversial about Tertullian, which must not be ignored as it was not ignored by Reformed theologians either, namely his Montanist past and certain detachment from the early Christian Church (Wypustek 1997: 279).

The Montanism of the second century Tertullian decide to join and adhere to, came close to a sectarian movement, which was often charged and persecuted by Roman authorities because of their alleged illicit magical practices and sorcery (Wypustek 1997: 283). This could constitute a reason for not being explicitly quoted more frequently by Szőnyi. Still, Tertullian was an early authority with a significant influence on his contemporaries, then later on, upon the whole Western Church, both Catholic and Reformed. In addition to his remarkable influence, he was among the very first witnesses and reporters of Christian persecution, not primordially recording cases but mostly reflecting about the ethical, theological and culturally notable consequences of the persecution. Eusebius himself, the para-

mount source for early modern Reformed martyrological tradition, had appreciated his works, and quoted especially those writings related to persecution and martyrdom.

Furthermore, Tertullian's appreciation and authority was increasing during the Reformation as well. Several editions of his works were published in early modern times. It was Calvin who recognized Tertullian's importance, and despite the Montanist episode in the Church Father's life, treated him as a great authority. Hence, Tertullian constituted Calvin's sixth most popular patristic or medieval source. Using the 1528 edition of Tertullian's collected works, Calvin predominantly quoted him upon the issue of martyrdom and persecution not less than 119 times between 1535 and 1563 (Lane 2002: 9-10). These details are important, for they also allow us to evaluate Szőnyi's use and assumable knowledge of Tertullian. Szőnyi, as a Calvinist, not only took a similar moral and theological stand as Calvin concerning persecution and martyrdom, but while articulating a narrative, he relied on Calvin, especially on his letters and the sources used by the Genevian Reformer.

Nevertheless, the imminent question is to what an extent had Calvin mediated or influenced Szőnyi's access to Tertullian, or had Szőnyi read Tertullian at all? It is my conviction that despite the abundance of the quotations available in Calvin's works presumably assimilated by Szőnyi, he had also read Tertullian. Although the first Hungarian translation of the Church Father was only published in the eighteenth century, during the 16-17th century several editions of his oeuvre were available in Hungary. By the time Szőnyi started his writing, sometimes around 1671, he may have well found and read Tertullian's works. However, Szőnyi's discourse unmistakably comprises Tertullian's views, concepts and conviction to such an extent that it is worth confronting the similarities and differences between their writings reflecting the issues of persecution and martyrdom.

III. 3. 1. Szőnyi and Tertullian

The previous subsection exhibited some arguments reiterating the assertion that early modern discourses on martyrdom reached back and incorporated the martyrological tradition of the early church, fabricating a debatable continuity with the distant past in order to claim orthodoxy and antiquity for the Reformed Church. This spectacular act of inventing a tradition, displaying all the characteristics enumerated by Hobsbawm, constituted a common phenomenon in early modern Reformed theological and cultural environments; thus a late example has been offered by the Hungarian Szőnyi, reflecting and partially narrating the persecution of the 1670s. The task of this particular subsection is to engage on a comparative analysis between Szőnyi and Tertullian in order to reveal the invented character of the Hungarian martyrological tradition. I shall consider three major thematic points of juncture between Szőnyi's and Tertullian's discourse, which constitute the basis of my comparative analysis.

The persecution as an experience and its narrativization constitutes the first major point of my comparative examination. Szőnyi, much like Tertullian, did not provide a classical master narrative about the persecution, which would function as an alternative account of ecclesiastical history, but confined himself to pointing out a continuity in the lineage of both martyrs and persecutors, so that he could elaborate more on the concept of martyrdom. Accordingly, Szőnyi enumerated the great persecutors of the True Church from biblical times to his present (Szőnyi 1675b: A4r-B4r), but unlike Eusebius, he did not provide an ecclesiastical narrative. He was much more preoccupied imitating Tertullian, thus transposed his focus on the question of martyrdom as an experience of persecution. Conse-

quently, this fearful account of Szőnyi, surveying the history of Christianity as a successive series of bloody persecution, seems to confirm Tertullian's claim exposed in the *Apologeticum*: „*Semen est sanguis Christianorum*”⁶ (Tertullianus 1853: 301).

Szőnyi, I believe, favoured Tertullian's more reflexive pattern of discourse over Eusebius's ecclesiastical narrative genre, for it rendered more convincingly his goals as a martyr-ologist. He did not need to provide the history of Church in Royal Hungary and Transylvania because he wanted to write a conduct book which would encourage, first of all, the refugees to dare undertaking martyrdom and suffer the afflictions of the exile. Szőnyi, though sharing the vision about the True Church promoted by Eusebius and then the Reformers, chose another genre to exhibit martyrdom as a complex conduct. It was Tertullian and his writings that were more fittingly tailored to the particularities of his martyrology. Both Szőnyi and Tertullian dedicated a determining attention to the experience and condition of being persecuted. They described the duties and moral obligations which were to be fulfilled, thus envisaging a pattern of ideal conduct, that is, an archetypal hero who was to perform the role of the martyr. Despite the unavoidable differences, their view on what and who can be qualified as a martyr has several overlapping, even identical, aspects.

Yet, there is one relatively short textual account about persecution in Szőnyi's account: the story of his own persecution, added as an appendix to his book (Szőnyi 1675b: O5r-O8v). However, the narrated episode was neither a deviation from imitating Tertullian's pattern nor an attempt to provide ecclesiastical history, for it endorsed the definition of martyrdom provided by Szőnyi, and unmistakably immortalized himself as a martyr and a writer. Again, a procedure which was common amongst early modern martyrologists such as John Foxe (Minton 2002: 735) and many others, who were disposed not only to produce several *récit martyrologique*, but to preserve their own memory as both martyrs and writers.

The second point of juncture allowing a comparison between Szőnyi and Tertullian is the one centred upon *the subject(s) of persecution*, which basically coincides with the concepts of martyr and martyrdom. There is a complete agreement between the two authors concerning the definition of martyrdom, which originated, as both Szőnyi and Tertullian accepted, from the Greek word and concept of witnessing. Szőnyi's book associated martyrdom with the symbol of the crown, which was not only a biblical locus but it had multiple hidden connections to Tertullian's works: „*De Corona Militum/On Military Garland*” and „*Ad Martyras/To the Martyrs*.” One of the most fitting biblical passages, which makes reference to a crown as a reward and can be associated with martyrdom, is to be found in the Books of Revelations 2. v. 10 and reads like this: I shall give thee the crown of life (*dabo tibi coronam vitae*). This biblical passage, not incidentally at all, appears in both Tertullian's „*De Corona*” and Szőnyi's „*The Crown of the Martyrs*” for both texts were applying this locus and symbol to the act of martyrdom, suggesting that he who undertook witnessing and died as a martyr would gain eternal life. Tertullian, in his unmistakably radical way, asserted that Christians are not allowed to wear garlands, crowns or wreaths: „*Coronam capiti non convenire*” (Tertullianus 1853: 339).

6 „The blood of the Martyrs/Christians is the seed of the Church”.

He also claimed that wearing crowns constituted an integrant part of idolatry: „...*ad daemones pertinent*„ (Tertullianus 1853: 341)

Moreover, as such, the act of wearing crowns or anything on Christians' heads was linked to the cult of death and defined as superstition (*superstitio*).⁷ Then, having surveyed all the possible forms, cases and occasions of wearing garlands, crowns or wreaths, Tertullian suggested that Christians should have followed Christ in this matter as well, and should have desired his crown and suffering. Finally he concluded that Christians should have done what God demanded from them; if they did so, including witnessing and dying as martyrs, they would receive their crown. As an illustration and authority he quoted the abovementioned biblical passage: Revelations 2. v. 10. It is worth pointing out that this is probably one of the very first interpretations of this biblical passage explicitly applied to persecution and martyrdom.

Furthermore, in an earlier work, written around 202, Tertullian had already pointed out some thoughts about the crown to be worn by martyrs, which constituted an important textual antecedent for his later work, „*De corona*”. In the „*Ad Martyras*” Tertullian developed a complex analogy, taking as a starting point for his comparison the glorious Roman soldier, who, upon his victorious returning from the battle, received a crown or garland and was celebrated as a hero. In comparison, Christians kept in prison and waiting for execution, through their brave witnessing and accepting the major sacrifice for Christ and his Church, were also heroes rewarded with crowns. Tertullian referring to the apostle, emphasized the superiority of the Christian hero claiming that while Roman soldiers won only their perishable crown (*corona corruptibilis*), martyrs were offered the everlasting crown (*corona aeterna*) of eternal life:

„*Et illi, inquit apostolus, ut coronam corruptibilem consequantur. Nos aeternam consecuturi...*” (Tertullianus 1853:11).

Therefore, in view of this particular context, it is almost certain that Szőnyi, when adding the biblical quotation (Rev. 2.v.10) to the flyleaf of his book, relied equally on the Bible and on Tertullian as well. For the message of the ultimate witnessing coinciding with martyrdom could have been associated to the Bible as well, but the explicit interpretation of this passage and its incorporation into a martyrological tradition might have been provided by Tertullian's writings. Szőnyi, I believe, chose the symbol of the crown as the title of his book after he had thoroughly assimilated Tertullian's opinion.

As for the concept of the martyr, Szőnyi, seems to follow more or less in the footsteps of his great master. Szőnyi gave his readers ten definitions of the martyr, out of which only definition number nine deserve some special attention. As I have presented in a previous subsection, Szőnyi, this time in opposition to Tertullian, defined the refugees, exiles and immigrants as martyrs, which contradicts the moral impetus imposed by Tertullian: not to

7 The prohibition of wearing flower wreaths had occurred in Tertullian's discourse even earlier. In the *Apologeticum*, which is an enthusiastic but rhetorically exquisite apology of Christianity, he pointed out that Christians would not buy flowers to wear it on their heads as a wreath: *non emo capiti coronam* (Tertullianus 1853:274).

run away. This contradiction will be assessed at a later point in this paper, as for now I confine myself only to allude to this difference between the two authors. In spite of this disagreement regarding the fled of the persecuted persons, their view of the martyr as a patient sufferer reveals total compliance. *Patience* is an attribute of the martyr, which points to similarity in their discourses. I have no intention of reiterating the findings exposed earlier when describing the early modern stoic context of patience as a pattern of conduct; instead, I prefer to set forth those hardly detectable intertextual traces, which relate Szőnyi's discourse to the oeuvre of Tertullian.

The text entitled „*De Patientia*” written by Tertullian around 200-203 AD claims to provide its readers with both the practice (*disciplina*) and theory (*ratio*) of the patience (Tertullianus 1853: 614), which deserves to be defined as the greatest virtue:

„...*summae virtutis appellatione honorant*” (Tertullianus 1853: 588).

Tertullian in his work merged the notions of *patience*, *obedience* and *penitence* so that he could exhibit in his discourse the moral obligation of enduring sufferings (Tertullianus 1853: 609). Accordingly, while pondering upon the patience of the body (*patientia corporis*), Tertullian recalled the example of Job, an archetypical sufferer, to add moral support to this claim. The church father concluded that fulfilling martyrdom was also a matter of patience (Tertullianus 1853: 613). Such a strong connection articulated between morality, self-sacrifice and Christian belief could not have any other aim but to elevate both martyrdom and the martyr in the eyes of the persecuted early Christians. The discourse ensuing from this view revealed a more radical Tertullian, who not only extended to the limits the concept of patience and endurance, but imposed it as universally compulsory for all Christians to suffer or even die for Christ. In his „*De fuga in persecution*” written after 212 AD, he set forth a ruthless argumentation declaring:

Non potest qui pati timet eius esse qui passus est. At qui pati non timet, iste perfectus erit in dilectione, utique dei. Perfecta enim dilectio foras mittit timorem. Et ideo multi vocati, pauci electi (Tertullianus 1853: 491).⁸

Having surveyed all these textual links, it is possible to surmise that Szőnyi, when elaborating upon the patience of the persecuted ones, had in mind not only the contemporary ideas of neostoicism but the corresponding passages, some of them exhibited above, from Tertullian's oeuvre.

Patience as the utmost feature of a martyr's conduct leads us to the third major issue sustaining my comparative examination of Szőnyi and Tertullian. Thus, the conduct during persecution, it is the last issue positing alongside these two discourses on martyrdom. A first major differentiation is required, despite the generalizing tendency of both authors for they agreed that average people and priests of the True Church may have had different duties and moral obligations when persecuted. Tertullian asserted that a persecuted Chris-

⁸ „He who fears to suffer cannot belong to Him who suffered. But the man who does not fear to suffer will be perfect in love in the love, it is meant, of God; "for perfect love casteth out fear. And therefore many are called, but few chosen" (Tertullian 2006: 110).

tian was expected to act like a *miles gloriosus in Deo*; note that this idea and ambiguous symbolism braiding together military and Christian duties, was superbly imitated by Szőnyi, who declared the supreme military commander of the Refugees, Pál Wesselényi, a martyr. A further example is provided by Szőnyi's other book, recalling the memory of King Gustavus Adolphus, a great hero and pious Christian fittingly embodying the ideal of *miles gloriosus in Deo*.

The combined military and Christian attributes allude to a pattern of conduct compulsory for all, in which the patient suffering went along with courage and self-sacrifice. Yet, there is one particular point where the two of them seem to contradict each other, though it is clear that Szőnyi was looking for a compromise in this debated matter. Besides, the changing times had their own contribution to it as well, for Tertullian's Montanist radicalism could not be smoothly applied to early modern realities; it needed to be adapted to the historical, cultural and social context of the Reformation. Not only Szőnyi, but many other outstanding representatives of the Reformed élite chose exile to survive persecution or avoid execution. Important individuals, communities or even institutions survived in exile and contributed to the success of the Reformation ignoring and contradicting Tertullian's expectations.

It was Calvin, for instance, who expressed his dissatisfaction with Tertullian's rigorist stance upon the problem of whether fleeing away was allowed during persecution (Lane 2002: 12–13). For the position coherently expressed by Tertullian in all of his works and highly emphasized in his „*De Fuga in Persecutione*”, was that Christians must not avoid persecution either by running or any other way, for they had to accept death and ensuing martyrdom (Tertullianus 1853: 470–471, 486). This perception of martyrdom and the heroic, but somehow senseless, conduct imposed by it could not be accepted in early modern times. Living martyrs, as I have already elaborated on this issue, could have had a more useful contribution to the cause of the Reformation than dead people.

However, Tertullian claimed that priests, as pastors, were even more important to serve and take care of the flock in any circumstances. The magistrates of the Church must not desert the believers: „...*praepositis ecclesiae in persecution fugere non oportebit*” (Tertullianus 1853: 481).

Furthermore, Tertullian claimed that only a bad shepherd, who saw the wolf, would run away: „*Malus pastor est qui viso lupi fugit*” (Tertullianus 1853: 481).

Szőnyi was certainly aware of the fact that Calvin, in this particular matter of staying alive by running away or wait for execution, refused Tertullian's standpoint; moreover, Szőnyi himself was forced to run away from his parish in Torna while suffering persecution. As high as it was Tertullian's esteem and authority in his eyes, he rationally judged the historically different situation and not only agreed with Calvin at Tertullian's expense, but he also fled. Still, Szőnyi was eager to work out a compromise; especially that he probably felt the need to justify himself in the eyes of his parish. Thus his approach was to describe both possibilities of running away and staying, then separately reflect on them. Accordingly, he claimed that there were situations when a priest was not allowed to run away, but had to face his persecutors; but there were cases when the priest was allowed to run so that he would escape his persecutors (Szőnyi 1675b: 10). Consequently, Szőnyi argued that in those cases: 1. when the persecution was not a real danger but just a rumour; and 2. when the

parish and the priest were persecuted for the same cause and in the same manner/at the same degree, the priest was not allowed to desert his believers. (Szőnyi 1675b: 9–10). Yet, Szőnyi surveyed those cases when the priest's running away was justifiable and acceptable: 1. the presence of the priest could have endangered the safety of the whole community; 2. although the priest was ready to confront his persecutors, but the parish had absolved him from this duty and sent him away; 3. when the parish dissipated.

Szőnyi's efforts for conciliating this opposition between Tertullian's stand and the early modern historical realities he has experienced, confirms his preoccupation of following the Church Father's teaching, in order to profit of his authority when explaining away the story of his persecution. However, this comparison, I believe, does confirm my suggestion that Szőnyi's use and knowledge of Tertullian was more significant than it may look at a superficial glance or simply judged by the discouraging number of explicit quotations or references. Consequently, the invented character of the Hungarian martyrological tradition is significantly sustained by this comparison, revealing a deliberate act of appropriating the theological orthodoxy and authority of an extant tradition to which a fictitious link has been fabricated. The fictitious aspect of this imposed and alleged continuity between the tradition of persecution promoted by Tertullian's and Szőnyi's discourse is unfolded by the different treatments of persecution and escape. Despite Szőnyi's attempts to reach a conciliatory position, the act of invention is disclosed; not even the tagging of the personal account of persecution as a *récit martyrologique* can hide this.

Yet, this is unavoidable, for as Hobsbawm was explaining it, this is the very nature of the invented tradition. Thus, Szőnyi imitating the praxis of the influential early modern martyrologists, had no choice but to follow the standard procedure, by inventing a tradition he was instantly incorporating into a new one, whose authority and validity was imposed in this particular manner. Early modern persecuted victims needed a powerful historical precedent to display and impose their martyr identity beyond any question.

IV. EARLY MODERN HUNGARIAN MARTYROLOGY AS AN INVENTED TRADITION

The previous subsection provided a detailed comparison between Szőnyi's and Tertullian's martyrological discourse patently reinforcing my hypothesis that Szőnyi thoroughly relied on the Church Father's oeuvre despite the missing frequent quotations. Apart from the enlisted similarities, there was only one issue upon which their view did not coincide; though Szőnyi had made efforts to conciliate the different standpoints. Indeed, this issue whether Christians should or could run away from their persecutors is not that much a contradiction, it is the normal consequence of the different historical contexts of the persecutions. While for early Christians the option of running or escaping might have been just a temporary solution, a mere postponement of an imminent execution, Protestants, and later on Calvinists, did have this choice of choosing exile and carry on with their lives. Moreover, the Reformation itself was a complex historical phenomenon organised and sustained to a remarkable extent by exiled individuals, communities, and institutions.

For instance, Basel and its printing shops, had an enormous contribution to the success of the Reformation, but all this impressive work was organized and performed by emigrants such as John Foxe. Calvin's case is far too well-known, but it is worth mentioning the Scottish élite, who often went in exile? in the Dutch Republic. This practice of emigrating per-

sisted for two centuries and resulted in configuring a remarkable culture of migration (Smout 1994: 115; Gardner 2004: 9-11). Exile, it seems, was a reliable alternative for the supporters of the Reformation, thus Reformed martyrologies had to sustain the choice of emigration. Tertullian's standpoint about persecution could not be adapted to a modified historical reality, which demanded, for the best interest of the Reformation, the acceptance of exile as a valid choice.

This is the case of Hungarian martyrology as well, which emerged as a late development in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The political and military implications of the persecution articulated such a situation in which exile was not only a reliable, but sometimes the only choice. Szőnyi, as a persecuted priest, but also as a supporter and a participant in Thököly's military campaign, could not dismiss exile from his martyrology. On the contrary, his task was to define and promote it as integral part of a late Calvinist martyrology, displaying the ultimate loyalty towards the Church and the fatherland (Tóth 2012: 178). In doing so, Szőnyi had two types of sources he could rely on, the early modern martyrologies and the tradition of the Primitive Church. Szőnyi, having made good use of both, set forth a discourse, which can be given the credit of being a purposeful act of inventing tradition.

However, Szőnyi was successful, although we do not possess information confirming further editions of his Hungarian martyrology. Still, we have the remarkable case of János Komáromi, a political exile, who might have personally known Szőnyi or might have read his book. When reaching the final destination of his exile in Nicomedia, he wrote in 1701 a remarkable entry in his diary. Deeply impressed by the history of the region, he not only remembered the Christian martyrs persecuted and killed there during the rule of Emperor Diocletian, but he found a moving parallel between their own exile and the persecution of the early Christians:

„I feel as a release that our martyrdom has been ordained to this place.
Blessed be God!” (Komáromi 1861: 76)

Although Komáromi was not a priest, he reproduced the rationale of Szőnyi's martyrological discourse, and further added an important aspect to it. Indeed, in Komáromi's view, as his other writings are testifying it, undertaking political exile was the equivalent to martyrdom. It is remarkable that 25 years after the first edition of Szőnyi's „The Crown of the Martyrs”, the martyrological discourse had been taken over by political representation. Accordingly, Komáromi's concept of martyrdom was no longer organically linked to the Church; it freed itself from the perspective of the struggle between the True Church and False Church in order to focus upon its most important component, that is, instead of Church (*Ecclesia*) the fatherland (*Patria*). Consequently, he used the theological teaching about the patient endurance of affliction to promote the pattern of the martyr, but with the deliberate aim to demonstrate the relevance of the concept *pro patria mori* without any theological references (Kantorowicz 1951: 487-88). Thus, solely love towards the homeland (*Patria*) or exile, as an extreme experience undergone as a consequence of this feeling and attitude, was promoted as the chief criterion of his martyrology, in fact, his patriotism. (Tóth 2010: 567)

V. CONCLUSION

This paper is meant to be a contribution to a more complex scholarly debate about traditions and their users, inventors and promoters. It is my conviction that the Reformation was particularly such a period when the concept and multiple uses of almost any tradition raised high anxiety and attention. The complicated example of early modern martyrology convincingly illustrates the competition over traditions. My intention was to propose a historical anthropological view upon a spectacular process, during which Tertullian's text were interpreted, incorporated and adapted to the needs of a community, successful in acquiring, in fact, inventing a tradition, which supported their claim of constituting *the* True Church with unquestionable authority and orthodoxy in its doctrine. Yet, this impressive hermeneutical act of appropriating an extant tradition, enthrallingly deflected, for the invented tradition could not be artificially preserved within the frames of confessional culture. It was just a matter of time until it broke the pattern, and irreversibly transubstantiated into a new type of discourse, the political one.

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